



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1st, 1864.

## MENDELSSOHN'S LETTERS.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

*Author of "Musings of a Musician."*

THE publication of Mendelssohn's correspondence with the members of his family—revealing as it does the loving nature of the man, who turns to his own home for counsel and sympathy, in the midst of the excitement of travel, and the lavish praise of his worshippers—has so much real interest for artists, that we trust they may be most extensively read. The first volume, comprising what may be termed the boy-life of the young artist, contains chiefly those letters written from Italy, Switzerland and France, at a time when every new scene, every work, whether of nature or art, made so vivid an impression upon his susceptible mind, that his communications, thrown off in a fever of enthusiasm, seem literally overflowing with admiration and gratitude. Having only attained his twenty-first year when he commenced his tour, it may be supposed how, with a nature so filled with that artistic instinct which attracted him towards all that was great and noble in his travels, he must have been materially aided in the development of his own musical career, by the study of those monuments of genius by which he was daily surrounded. Music was with him an art with which to glorify and enrich the world; and that sympathy which binds all artist minds in one, led him to the worship of those who felt with him, whether that feeling were uttered in poetry, painting, sculpture, or sound. His veneration for Goethe was a proof how deeply his works had entered into his very nature; and the interview between the young musician and the old poet, related in one of his letters before setting out on his tour, calls up a vivid picture of the interesting scene. "After dinner," he says, "he all at once began—'Gute Kinder, hübsche Kinder, muss immer lustig sein—Tolles Volk,' etc., his eyes looking like those of a drowsy old lion. Then he begged me to play to him, and said that it seemed strange that he had heard no music for so long; that he supposed we had made great progress, but he knew nothing of it. He wished me to tell him a great deal on the subject, saying, 'Do let us have a little rational conversation together;,' and turning to Ottilie, he said, 'No doubt you have already made your own wise arrangements, but they must yield to my express orders, which are, that you must make tea here this evening, that we may be all together again.' When, in return, she asked him if it would not make him too late, as Riemer was coming to work with him, he replied, 'As you gave your children a holiday

from their Latin to-day, that they might hear Felix play, I think you might also give me one day of relaxation from *my* work.'

That Mendelssohn watched every muscle of his face whilst he held him entranced with his playing, may be inferred from every account that he gives of his performance in his presence. "In the forenoon," he writes, "he likes me to play to him the compositions of the various great masters, in chronological order, for an hour, and also tell him the progress they have made, while he sits in a dark corner, like a Jupiter Tonans, his old eyes flashing on me. He did not wish to hear anything of Beethoven's, but I told him that I could not let him off, and played the first part of the symphony in C minor. It seemed to have a singular effect on him; at first, he said, 'This causes no emotion, nothing but astonishment; it is *grandiose*.' He continued grumbling in this way; and after a long pause he began again: 'It is very grand, very wild; it makes one fear that the house is about to fall down; and what must it be when played by a number of men together?'"

All who knew Mendelssohn can readily imagine the delight with which he yielded himself to the influence of Goethe's mind; and when he was told that the poet whom he had revered from a child, hoped to "learn much" from him, and that there were many subjects he had at heart that the young artist "must explain to him," we may pardon him for saying that he began to feel "twice as tall" in his own estimation.

In confirmation of our opinion that the mind of the real artist seeks for beauty and grandeur of conception not only in that special form with which his own sympathies are most in accordance, but in all those which appeal with eloquence to the human race, we cannot refrain from dwelling on the glowing description of Mendelssohn's feelings in the contemplation of the great pictures in Italy; an undoubted proof how an earnest admiration of the highest specimens in one art, may lead to the desire of creating equally undying works in another. After speaking of some modern Venetian paintings, he says, "As all these are totally insignificant, I cling to the ancient masters, and study how they worked. Often, after doing so, I feel a musical inspiration; and since I came here, I have been busily engaged in composition."

How the pictures of such masters as Titian affected him, may be gleaned from many of his letters from Italy. From the contemplation of the beautiful scenery surrounding him, and from the companionship of many of those who would have flattered him to his heart's content, he voluntarily withdrew himself, to gaze alone on those masterpieces of genius which spoke to him, as with a living voice. Of Titian, he says, "Till now I never knew that he was the felicitous artist I have this day seen him to be. That he thoroughly enjoyed life in all its beauty and fullness, the picture in Paris proves; but he has

fathomed the depths of human sorrow, as well as the joys of Heaven. His glorious 'Entombment,' and also the 'Assumption,' fully evince this. How Mary floats on the cloud, while a waving movement seems to pervade the whole picture; how you see at a glance her very breathing, her awe and piety, and, in short, a thousand feelings,—all words seem poor and commonplace in comparison." And, again, in speaking of the "Entombment," he says, "It is a composition that speaks to my heart, and fills me with enthusiasm, and will never leave my memory."

In his study of the "Martyrdom of St. Peter," he writes, "My contemplation of it was disturbed by some one strumming most sacrilegiously on the organ, and these sacred forms were forced to listen to such miserable opera *finales*. But this matters not; where such pictures are, I require no organist. I play the organ in my thoughts for myself, and feel as little irritated by such trash, as I should be by an ignorant rabble."

The sunny life of Mendelssohn during his short tour in Italy and Germany, is one which furnishes ample study to all who falsely desire to *teach*, rather than to *learn*, at the outset of their artistic career. The wish to acquire was with him a passion; and in all his confidential letters to his sister, his earnest hope of one day becoming famous, is coupled with the wish that he may be worthy of his fame. Music he regarded as a language, which to use, except in the expression of what the heart felt, was a crime; and hence he never sacrificed his reputation for the mere sake of gain, or the applause of the moment. In a letter bearing on this subject from Milan, addressed to Edward Devrient, he says, "You reproach me with being two-and-twenty without having yet acquired fame. To this I can only reply, had it been the will of Providence that I should be renowned at the age of two-and-twenty, I no doubt should have been so. I cannot help it, for I no more write to gain a name, than to obtain a Kapellmeister's place. It would be a good thing if I could secure both. But so long as I do not actually starve, so long is it my duty to write only as I feel, and according to what is in my heart, and to leave the results to *Him* who disposes of other and greater matters." Here we see clearly how high a standard of art he had erected for himself; and how little he regarded that empty praise which would have made him turn from what he conceived a sacred duty. The following extract from a letter to Wilhelm Taubert, will again show his reverence for true greatness; and may well be taken to heart by many who consider that to speak slightly of a man of genius is a proof of superior intellect. "I was obliged," he writes, "to digest the supercilious Menzel, who presumed modestly to depreciate Goethe, and the supercilious Grabbe, who modestly depreciates Shakespeare, and the philosophers, who proclaim Schiller to be rather trivial! Is this new, arrogant, overbearing spirit,

this perverse cynicism, as odious to you as it is to me? and are you of the same opinion with myself, that the first and most indispensable quality of any artist is to feel respect for great men, and to bow down in spirit before them; to recognise their merits, and not to endeavour to extinguish their great flame, in order that his own feeble rushlight may burn a little brighter? If a person be incapable of feeling true greatness, I should like to know how he intends to make *me* feel it. And as all these people, with their airs of contempt, only at last succeed in producing imitations of this or that particular form, without any presentiment of free, fresh, creative power, unfettered by individual opinion, or æsthetics or criticism, or the whole world besides; as this is the case, do they not deserve to be abused? And I do abuse them."

The modest feeling of doubtfulness in his future is evident throughout the whole of his correspondence. He seems as if he felt that the works of a real artist arose almost spontaneously, and as it were almost apart from his own control. Whenever he speaks of his extempore playing, for instance, it appears as if his subject wandered of its own accord, and his fingers were compelled to follow it. After a few introductory chords, he says on one occasion, "I subsided into a choral melody in E minor. At length the consumptive deep bass resounded quite alone—then came, in its turn, the flute, high up in the treble, with the choral in the same key; and so the sounds of the organ gradually died away."

We have hitherto selected only from those portions of Mendelssohn's correspondence which show the gradual growth of his mind as an artist; but there are other phases of his character deeply interesting to those who would really wish to gain an intimate knowledge of his individuality. That the sensitive nature of his organization made him yearn for that constant communion with his family, without which his enjoyments seemed but half completed, is manifest by the pouring out of his happiness upon every occasion to his dear sister Fanny. His avowal, too, that when he feels lonely and dispirited, he does not desire her society so earnestly as when he feels happy and full of health, is in thorough consonance with his whole nature. With a more selfish person, this feeling would be precisely reversed.

His veneration for his parents runs like a golden thread through the whole of his early life; and not only the letters to his father, but the intellectual respect and deeply-rooted affection for him displayed throughout his correspondence with others, plainly indicate that although his mind was actively employed, and his enjoyments intense and ever varying, the desire for his father's love, and approval of his course of action, was the one thing always uppermost in his thoughts. A letter to his brother and sisters respecting their mode of treatment of his father, is so perfectly beautiful in the tenderness of its style—so full of real and

loving forbearance towards those whom we should honor and respect, that we cannot do justice to its writer without quoting all that relates to this subject precisely as it stands.

After saying that his father had often insisted on abusing Beethoven, and "all visionaries," to him; and that on one occasion he remembers to have been sent out of the room for praising him, he continues thus:—"At last, however, it occurred to me that I might speak a great deal of truth, and yet avoid the particular truth obnoxious to my father; so the aspect of affairs speedily began to improve, and soon all went well. Perhaps you may have in some degree forgotten that you ought now and then to be forbearing, and not aggressive. My father considers himself both much older and more irritable than, thank God, he really is; but it is our duty always to submit our opinion to his, even if the truth bears much on our side, as it often is on his, when opposed to us. Strive, then, to praise what he likes, and do not attack what is implanted in his heart, more especially ancient established ideas. Do not commend what is new, till it has made some progress in the world, and acquired a name, for, till then, it is a mere matter of taste. Try to draw my father into your circle, and be playful and kind to him; in short, try to smooth and to equalize things; and remember that I, who am now an experienced man of the world, never yet knew any family, taking into due consideration all defects and failings, who have hitherto lived so happily together as ours."

The intensity of Mendelssohn's love and thankfulness for the beauties of nature, so profusely scattered around, lends a peculiar charm to his communications, whilst on his youthful travels; and wherever he meets with the commonplace tourists who criticise nature as they would criticise a bale of goods, he is never sparing of his contempt for them. "A fiercely-moustachioed German," he says in one of his letters, "was with me in the boat, who examined all the beautiful scenery, as if he were about to purchase it, and thought it too dear."

His own admiration for the works of nature is so pure, and untainted with worldly considerations, that, as in Titian's pictures, or Goethe's poetry, he seems to long that all mankind should be made better by the contemplation of such beauty, and that he is somewhat selfish in taking the enjoyment only to himself. There can be little doubt that his after life was much coloured by the early impression made upon his mind during the time that these letters were written; and he seems delighted to withdraw himself from men, in order that he may seek inspiration from those works which rather humbled than exalted him in his own estimation. In a letter from Naples, he says:—"The pleasure we enjoy in England through men, we here enjoy through nature; and as there is no corner there, however small, of which some one has not taken posses-

sion, in order to cultivate and adorn it, so here there is no spot which nature has not appropriated, bringing forth on it flowers and herbs, and all that is beautiful."

When we study the character of Mendelssohn, as revealed through his correspondence, we see how strongly the individuality of the man is stamped upon his works. The reading of his letters is like the performance of his music. With a certain restlessness, even in his enjoyments, there was always that under-current of calmness and reliance upon his own strength, which enabled him to think clearly, to write clearly, and to play clearly—even when, as he says, he extemporized at a merry party in his lodgings, "with nothing in his head but wine-glasses, benches, cold roast-meat, and ham." His adoration of Bach, and his early initiation into the beauties of Beethoven—that continual source of contention with his father—led him at once to regard the highest class of composition as the only one worthy of an artist's ambition; nor did the society he was compelled to endure in Vienna succeed, in the slightest degree, in altering his convictions.

"The people I associated with there," he says, "were so dissipated and frivolous, that I became quite spiritually-minded, and conducted myself like a divine among them. Moreover, not one of the best pianoforte players there, male or female, ever played a note of Beethoven; and when I hinted that he and Mozart were not to be despised, they said, 'So you are an admirer of classical music?' 'Yes,' said I."

The last letter in the first volume is from London. "I am now going," he says, "to Moscheles' concert, to conduct there, and to play Mozart's concerto, in which I have inserted two long cadences for each of us." Those who can recollect his playing on this occasion, will remember what these cadences were—how he threw his whole genius on to the keys, and spoke to his audience through the mind of Mozart. Indeed, no pianist, we believe, had so much the power of identifying himself with his author; he played as if he were extemporizing, and his fingers seemed instinct with the living mind of the composer whose work he was interpreting.

With the first volume of these letters ends what may be called the youthful life of Mendelssohn. We shall afterwards see how the hopes and fears of these early years were realised in the ripe manhood of one of the truest artists the world has yet seen. Already he had composed a large number of works, including the *Walpurgis Night*, which his ardent love for Goethe had induced him to commence and finish whilst on his tour; but an opera—the summit of his early ambition—was yet unattempted, and *St. Paul* and *Elijah* were still unthought of. We love to linger over these days when fame was gradually advancing from all quarters, and a long and bright career seemed opening before him; for

great as he afterwards became, and overwhelming as was the world's applause, the loss of those near and dear to him gave such repeated shocks to his sensitive mind, that many of the hours of his artistic triumph were clouded with anxiety and grief, and embittered with the thought that the loving and loved companions of his youth could no longer yield him that sympathy and advice which seemed as necessary to his existence as the air he breathed.

#### MR. HENRY LESLIE'S CHOIR.

THE first concert of the present season took place on Thursday, the 17th ult., at St. James's Hall. We have so frequently called attention to the excessive delicacy with which the compositions sung by this choir are invariably given, that we have little to add to our previous remarks on the present occasion. The programme was interesting on account of some clever madrigals by Mr. R. L. Pearsall and Mr. John Barnett, being mixed with so genuine a specimen of the old school as "Stay Corydon," by John Wilbye. Something in the words and music of the true madrigal seems to belong to a time long passed by; and although we listen with pleasure to such modern imitations as those given at this concert, we cannot but feel that they resemble those modern antiques which enthusiastic antiquaries love to build in their grounds, so that they may gratify themselves by looking backward, rather than forward, in their daily life. The "part-song" which, without wishing to disturb the madrigal as a pure specimen of a certain time and school, seems more in accordance with our present musical requirements is, we think, destined to supersede that quaint form of composition so successfully carried out in this country, at a time when the art was still struggling for life and freedom. Much interest was excited on this occasion by the performance of Spohr's *Ode to St. Cecilia*, for soprano and chorus with organ accompaniment, which was excellently given, Madame Lemmens Sherrington sustaining most ably the soprano solo. This composition, containing all the beauties of the style of this great master, contains also much of his mannerism; and rich as it is throughout in harmony, the ear seems to seek that repose which is essential to a work of this nature. A four-part song by Mr. Henry Smart, "Waken, lords and ladies gay" (Hunting Song), was sung for the first time; and is destined to add one more to the many charming compositions of its class which this composer has written; somewhat Mendelssohnian in character, it contains the elements of popularity, whilst appealing also to the educated musician. It was sung to perfection, and was much applauded. Madame Sherrington also sang a pleasing song of Mr. Leslie's, called "The Lark's message," exceedingly well, and also an air of Auber's, which was admirably suited to her voice and style. The instrumental performers were Herr Blumner (pianoforte), and M. Lotto (violin), the first of whom played Beethoven's "Thirty-three variations on a theme in C minor," and the latter a piece by Leonhard, and Paganini's "Witches' Dance." Altogether this was a most attractive concert, and Mr. Leslie deserves every praise for the spirited manner in which he carries on his enterprise.

#### SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY.

ON Friday, the 11th ult., the Christmas performances of the *Messiah* commenced, before a densely crowded audience. The wonderful progress the chorus of the society has made, was never more conspicuously displayed than on this occasion; and we doubt whether a finer performance of Handel's finest work was ever given. It may be supposed that the first appearance of Mr. Sims Reeves added materially to the attraction of the oratorio; and certainly, whether from a long rest, or from an earnest

desire to compensate for his absence, we never heard him in finer voice. Madame Parepa, and Madame Sainton Dolby, Mr. Renwick (who, with a fine voice, is still a student), and Mr. Patey, were the other vocalists. Mr. T. Harper's accompaniment to "The trumpet shall sound," was, as usual, one of the great features of the evening.

On the following Friday the *Messiah* was repeated with the same vocalists.

#### NATIONAL CHORAL SOCIETY.

THE performances of this society have commenced for the season, under the direction of Mr. G. W. Martin. The first oratorio, *Judas Maccabæus*, deserves especial mention, from the fact of Mr. W. H. Cummings having undertaken the tenor part, which was to have been sung by Mr. Sims Reeves, at a very short notice. On his own merits, Mr. Cummings fully deserved the hearty applause with which he was greeted; and the effect he created in "Sound an Alarm," may fairly warrant him in the belief that he is destined to take rank as a sound oratorio singer. Exeter Hall was crowded; and the chorus, on the whole, showed unmistakeable signs of careful training. On Wednesday, the 16th ult., the Christmas performance of the *Messiah* was given, the principal vocalists being Miss Emily Spiller, Miss Palmer, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Thomas.

#### THE THREE-CHOIR FESTIVAL FOR 1864.

THIS Triennial Musical Festival of the United Choirs of Worcester, Hereford, and Gloucester, will be this year held in Hereford; and promises to be one of the very best that has yet taken place. The Dean and Chapter have already granted the use of the Cathedral; and a great improvement will be effected by placing the orchestra at the west end, thus securing a more ample accommodation for the public than has been the case at any former festival. The evening concerts at the Shire Hall, too, will be rendered doubly attractive by the fact of a new orchestra having been erected, and other important alterations having been carried out, with the view of aiding the effect of the music, and the comfort of the audience. Mr. G. Townshend Smith, whose exertions in promoting the success of these meetings are so well known and appreciated, has resolved on this occasion to increase the number of stewards to fifty; and when we announce that forty-five of them have already accepted the office, it will be seen how large an amount of interest is felt in the undertaking. The following is a list of those who have given in their names:—The Right Hon. the Lord Bateman, Lord Lieutenant (second time); the Right Hon. the Earl Somers; the Right Hon. and Ven. the Lord Saye and Sele, D.C.L. (second time); the Right Hon. the Lord Northwick; the Right Hon. and Rev. G. Herbert, Clun (second time); the Hon. Colonel Windsor Clive, M.P., Hewell Grange, Bromsgrove; the Hon. P. Wyndham, M.P., 44, Belgrave-square, London; Sir V. Cornewall, Bart., Moccas Court (second time); Sir W. Curtis, Bart., Cainham Court (third time); Sir J. Russell Bailey, Bart., Glanusk Park; Admiral Sir T. Hastings, C.B., Titley Court (second time); J. King King, Esq., M.P., Staunton Park (second time); H. Mildmay, Esq., M.P., Gayton Hall (second time); Col. Clifford, M.P., Llancilio (second time); G. Glive, Esq., M.P., Perrystone (second time); G. Hardy, Esq., M.P., Hempsted Park, Staplehurst; the Mayor of Hereford, E. Pateshall, Esq., Pool House; J. H. Arkwright, Esq., Hampton Court (fourth time), R. Arkwright, Esq., 3, Eaton-place, West, London; F. L. Bodenham, Esq., Hereford (second time); Rev. J. Burdon, English Bicknor; W. H. Cooke, Esq., Q.C., 42, Wimpole-street, London; Rev. G. Cornewall, Moccas; Rev. G. Davenport, Foxley; T. Evans, Esq., Sufton Court (second time); J. Freeman, Esq., Gaines (second time); Rev. E. R. Hampden, Cradley (second time); Rev. E. B. Hawkshaw, Weston (second time); R. Hereford, Esq.,